

## A note on a recently discovered outlying population of the skink *Hemiergis peronii*

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### Abstract

On 22 July 2007 a specimen of the threatened skink *Hemiergis peronii*, was found near Jeparit in north-western Victoria, on the edge of the Mallee region. This is the second occasion on which the species has been recorded at this location and the record confirms the existence of an outlying population at this site. This secretive skink exists in similar habitat in neighbouring areas of South Australia, but has not previously been recorded from this habitat in Victoria. (*The Victorian Naturalist* 125 (4) 2008, 114–116)

*Hemiergis peronii* is a small, long-bodied, smooth scaled, secretive skink. It has a glossy appearance and very short, widely spaced limbs with small fingers and toes. The species is found over a wide area of southern Western Australia, coastal South Australia and far south-western Victoria, and usually inhabits drier sandy areas in forests, heaths and coastal shrublands (Cogger 2000; Wilson and Swan 2003).

Two sub-species are recognised: *Hemiergis peronii tridactyla*, which has three fingers and toes, from south-west coastal areas of Western Australia, and *Hemiergis peronii peronii*, which has four fingers and toes, from the southern interior of Western Australia, southern South Australia, including off-shore islands, and south-west Victoria. In Victoria, the common name of Four-toed Skink is recognised (Atlas of Victorian Wildlife 2006) and the species is listed as near threatened (DSE 2003). Until recently all records from Victoria have come from the far south-west corner of the state, except for one outlying record near Stawell, from about thirty years ago (Fig.1).

### New locality records from near Jeparit

In September 2001, one *H. p. peronii* was found under galvanised iron in a roadside verge several kilometres north of Jeparit, approximately 325 kilometres north-west of Melbourne, on the southern edge of the Victorian Mallee (Homan unpubl. data). The species had never previously been recorded from this district and at the time it was uncertain whether this specimen had been accidentally introduced to the site or whether it was part of a local population.

The site is a low-lying sandy area close

to a large salt lake with sparse vegetation consisting of scattered Black Box *Eucalyptus largiflorens*, several Slaty Sheoak *Allocasuarina muellerana* and Slender Cypress Pine *Callitris preissii*, with some Gold-dust Wattle *Acacia acinacea*, Grey Mulga *Acacia brachybotrya*, Mallee Wattle *Acacia montana*, Desert Cassia *Cassia nemophila* and Moonah *Melaleuca lanceolata*, with a ground cover of Grey Glasswort *Halosarcia halocnemoides*, Inland Pigface *Carpobrotus modestus* and some *Lomandra* sp. The site has undergone significant disturbance in the past, which has led to a major infestation of Onion Weed *Asphodelus fistulosus*.

On 22 July 2007, a second specimen of *H. p. peronii* (Figs. 2 and 3) was found at the site, also under galvanised iron, confirming that an outlying population of the species exists in the area (M Hutchinson, South Australian Museum, pers.comm).

*Hemiergis peronii peronii* is a common species in many parts of southern coastal South Australia, where it is found in all kinds of natural and disturbed habitats that fall within a dry, sandy, heathland type (M Hutchinson, pers.comm). Its distribution in that state extends well into inland areas. The species is common in Ngarkat Conservation Park in the South Australian Mallee, but has not been recorded in adjacent Victorian areas with similar habitat and climate, such as the Big Desert.

The discovery of this population near Jeparit, along with the previous record from near Stawell, suggests that the species may inhabit other parts of the Victorian Wimmera and southern Mallee that contain suitable habitat, and reinforces



Fig.1. Distribution map for Four-toed Skink *Hemiergis peronii* in Victoria.



Fig. 2. *Hemiergis peronii peronii* from Jeparit, dorsal view.



Fig. 3. *Hemiergis peronii peronii* from Jeparit, ventral view.

the need for ongoing field surveys of Victoria's herpetofauna.

#### Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Peter Robertson of Wildlife Profiles Pty Ltd who confirmed identification of specimens found near Jeparit, and to Mark Hutchinson, Senior Researcher, Herpetology Section, South Australian Museum, for information on the distribution and status of *Hemiergis peronii* within South Australia.

#### References

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Received 30 August 2007; accepted 21 February 2008

## One Hundred Years Ago

### LIZARDS IN CAPTIVITY

A pair of common "bloodsucker" lizards, *Tympanocryptis Kneata*, was captured at Fisherman's Bend on 12th October. Both have now been in captivity for two months. As a rule this species will not eat in captivity, but these specimens will feed freely, each devouring at a meal between 15 and 20 common house flies. They actively pursue the flies, which they catch on the end of the sticky tongue, and then proceed to chew leisurely. The larger lizard, while captive, shed its skin in small flakes, the largest patch of shed skin being about a quarter-inch square. The moulting process took about three weeks to complete. The ventral surface of this lizard is now yellow under the lower jaw, throat, and thorax; while it is pink under the hind legs and tail. The smaller lizard shows the normal greyish colouring. — R.W. ARMITAGE.

From *The Victorian Naturalist* XXIV, p. 148, January 9, 1908